
SECTION X. EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

This section of the *Guide for Implementing Urban Education Reform in Abbott Districts*:

- Describes the early childhood education program and its articulation with the WSR program model implemented in each school.

Regulations Related to Section X N.J.A.C. 6A:24

- 3.1 - Early Childhood Education General Provisions
- 3.2 - Full-Day Kindergarten
- 3.3 - Early Childhood Education Programs
- 3.4 - Early Childhood Education Program Operational Plan

A. INTRODUCTION

In August 1999, the Department of Education (DOE) established a Division of Early Childhood Education. Creation of this division, headed by an assistant commissioner, was one of the steps taken to ensure that the DOE's commitment to high-quality early childhood education was brought to fruition. "We have created this new division to highlight the importance we place on early childhood education for our youngest citizens," said Commissioner David Hespe. "The scale of this program, and our commitment to its success, is without equal. Not only will we be breaking new ground, we will be laying the foundation for a program that will have positive long-term benefits for our children and our state."

There is a compelling body of developmental research that emphasizes the substantial level of brain development that occurs during the early years of a child's life. Research further indicates that intensive high-quality early childhood education programs increase the ability of young children to succeed early in their educational lives which results in long-term school success and appropriate social behavior.

Research supports the position that early childhood education programs for children from low-income families help prepare them for future academic success in the early elementary years. A well-planned, high-quality early childhood education program that encompasses academic, health and social services, parental involvement, and professional development can help bridge the gap between home and school environments.

The November 1997 New Jersey Department of Education publication, *A Study of Supplemental Programs and Recommendations for the Abbott Districts* indicates that, in order to produce significant improvements in student achievement, supplemental programs, such as the early childhood education program, must be implemented as part of the district's whole school reform program. Therefore, early childhood education programs are essential elements for a comprehensive strategy of whole school reform.

At the start of the 1998-1999 school year, Abbott districts implemented full-day kindergarten. For the 1999-2000 school year, Abbott districts implemented half-day preschool programs for all three- and four-year-olds. By the commencement of the 2001-2002 school year, Abbott districts must implement full-day, full-year programs for three- and four-year-old children. Abbott school districts must collaborate with Department of Human Services (DHS)-licensed child care providers whenever practical and shall not duplicate programs and services otherwise available in the community.

According to regulations, early childhood education programs, whether provided in-district or through community providers, shall be aligned with the *Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality* that is linked to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. This document can be found on the department's Internet Web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>. In addition, the districts' early childhood education programs must be integrated with the WSR model(s) or WSR alternative program design(s) used in the school district.

B. EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM AID (ECPA) PLANS

ECPA Funding for Early Childhood Programs

The Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act of 1996 (CEIFA) provides districts with Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) to implement early childhood education programs. The ECPA formula is currently determined by the concentration of low-income school-aged children and modified K-12 student enrollment. To qualify for ECPA, a district must have a low-income population either equal to or greater than 20 percent of the school population. Additional funding is provided for districts that have concentrations of students at 40 percent or greater.

New Jersey's Early Childhood Program Aid (ECPA) first became available to districts in the 1997-1998 school year. In 1999-2000, 135 districts received ECPA funds. The 135 districts that received approximately \$310 million in ECPA funds included the 30 Abbott districts. The Abbott districts were required to implement whole school reform including the provision of early childhood education program implementation.

Amended Plan Requirements

Initially, each district receiving ECPA submitted a five-year operational plan beginning with the 1997-1998 school year. As a result of the 1998 Supreme Court decision, Abbott districts were required to submit an amended operational plan which outlined in

detail how they planned to meet the required 1998 deadline for full-day kindergarten and the 1999 deadline for providing half-day preschool programs for all three- and four-year-olds.

Abbott school districts shall amend their plans so that all three- and four-year-olds are offered full-day, full-year early childhood education programs by the 2001-2002 school year. The district shall provide any necessary information to the department to ensure that the program implementation is consistent with that plan.

Abbott districts must submit an annual early childhood operational plan. **The plan can be found on the New Jersey State Department of Education's Web site. www.state.nj.us/education/**

Roles and Responsibilities of the District

- Each Abbott district shall operate an early childhood education operational program consistent with that district's early childhood education plan approved by the department.
- To ensure quality programs, whether in-district or through community based early childhood education providers, the district shall provide programs that meet the Department's *Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality* that are linked to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards and are to be integrated by the district with the WSR model(s) or the whole school reform alternative program design(s) utilized in that district.
- Abbott districts must provide one teacher and one aide for every 21 children in kindergarten programs. Class size shall not exceed 21 children.
- Abbott districts must provide one teacher and one aide for every 15 children in early childhood education preschool programs. Class size shall not exceed 15 children.
- Abbott districts shall provide master teachers at a recommended ratio of one to every 20 preschool classrooms. Master teachers shall coordinate and facilitate early childhood education programs and assist in the provision of professional development.
- According to *N.J.A.C.6A:24-3.3(a)5* "Any board which establishes an early childhood education program and employs a new teacher must require the new teacher, by September 1, 2001, to hold the new teacher of Preschool through Grade 3 endorsement."
- Abbott districts shall ensure that family referral services are available to district-operated early childhood education programs and that family workers are provided by all DHS-licensed child care programs with which the board contracts.
- The board shall develop, in consultation with the department, community outreach and recruitment strategies to maximize participation in early childhood education programs. If enrollments in the early childhood education programs do not exceed 50 percent of the projected early childhood education population in the district, the board shall develop a corrective action plan to increase enrollments, which shall be approved by the Commissioner and then implemented by the district.

Contracting With Community-Based Early Childhood Education Programs

According to *N.J.A.C.6A:24-3.3(b)* “The board shall cooperate with or utilize a DHS-licensed child care provider whenever practical to implement required early childhood education programs and shall not duplicate programs or services otherwise available in the community. When the board enters into a contract with a DHS-licensed child care provider, the contract shall be in a form provided by or approved by the department and shall include clear expectations, necessary supports and accountability measures. The board shall contract with a DHS-licensed child care provider to provide services to preschool children when that provider is able and willing to comply with the following requirements:

1. Provide one teacher and one aide for every 15 children. Class size shall not exceed 15 children;
2. In consultation with a master teacher, provide programs that meet the Department's Early Childhood Education Program expectations that are linked to the Core Curriculum Content Standards and are integrated with the WSR model(s) or the whole school alternative program design(s) utilized in the district;
3. Require existing teachers who have experience working with young children but who otherwise lack academic credentials to make annual progress toward obtaining a bachelor's degree and a teacher of Preschool through Grade 3 endorsement and to obtain that endorsement by September 2004.
4. Require any newly hired teachers to:
 - a) have a bachelor's degree, enroll in the department's provisional teacher program and obtain appropriate early childhood education courses and obtain a teacher of Preschool through Grade 3 endorsement by September 2001; or
 - b) have a K-8 teacher's certificate, enroll in early childhood courses now, and obtain the proposed Preschool-3 certificate no later than September 2001.
5. Encourage all teacher aides, both new hires and existing staff to:
 - a) pursue an associate's degree in early childhood education, if they already have Child Development Associate/Certified Childcare Professional (CDA/CCP) credentials; and
 - b) pursue either the CDA or the CCP credential if they do not have CDA/CCP credentials.
6. Provide one family worker for every 40 children and their families being served by the center. The family worker shall work with the center and the parents to ensure that the parents and their children obtain necessary health and social services.”

Districts shall ensure that DHS-licensed child care providers comply with the contract requirements including the requirements of 6A:24-3.3(b) and shall conduct ongoing, on-site monitoring to assess compliance.

Requests for Waivers

- Upon offering full-day, full-year preschool programs, the district may request a waiver of this requirement under *N.J.A.C. 6A:24-3.3(c)*, as applicable, to provide families with options to enroll their children in a half-day program and/or a program that follows the school year calendar, providing that program meets all of the requirements of the regulations, subchapter 3.
- According to *N.J.A.C. 6A:24-3.3(c)1* " The board may receive a waiver on an annual basis from the Department to contract with a DHS-licensed child care provider that cannot meet the requirements of *N.J.A.C. 6A:24-3.3(b)4*. The DHS provider shall document its inability to hire an appropriately credentialed teacher and agree to hire a teacher for the school year who holds, at a minimum, the CDA or CCP credential.

1. The board request for a waiver shall include the following information on a form provided by the department:

- a) Explanation of the circumstances that require the employment of a person who does not meet the requirements of *N.J.A.C. 6A:24-3.3(b)4*....
- b) Demonstration of the process used in attempting to secure the services of an individual with standard certification to fill the vacancy;
- c) Documentation of communication notices and recruitment efforts (e.g., advertisements placed, colleges that were contacted, etc.) to employ a qualified individual;
- d) Identification of all appropriately certified individuals who applied for this position, if any; and
- e) Provision of a reason/justification, if applicable, why the certified applicant(s) is(are) not suitable for employment in the position.

C. WHOLE SCHOOL REFORM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM MODELS

The department does not require districts to adopt a particular curriculum model to implement as its early childhood education program. However, all early childhood education programs must address *Early Childhood Education Program Expectations: Standards of Quality*.

Two WSR models have early childhood education programs that were developed to articulate with their educational model. Those models are described in this section. Additional information regarding these models is available from the developers.

Success For All/Curiosity Corner

Curiosity Corner is a comprehensive early childhood education program for three- and four-year-olds developed by the Early Learning Development Team of the Success for All Foundation. The team developed this program as a connection with its kindergarten through grade six program, Success For All. The team drew from various early childhood curricula and research to develop its program. Curiosity Corner is based on the philosophy that children learn best when a core concept or theme is developed through a variety of activities that reinforce that concept. The program combines this thematic approach to learning with its own program components, such as "Clues and Questions" and "Rhyme Time," and established early childhood approaches, such as learning centers, in developing its curriculum. In addition, Curiosity Corner provides most of the materials for its thematic units, including books, its "Home Link," a weekly newsletter for parents, story packets to take home and daily tasks related to the classroom theme for children to do at home.

Comer School Development Program/Zigler Initiative (CoZi)

The Comer initiative is a combination of the School Development Program (SDP) developed by Dr. James Comer at the Yale Child Study Center and Dr. Edward Zigler's School of the 21st Century (21C) at the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy. The SDP and 21C have the same theoretical base and are complementary. The community develops an array of components at the school based on a needs assessment. This model aims to integrate services at the school site, transforming the school into a year-round, multiservice center providing services from early morning to early evening. The 21C components include year-round all-day child care for children ages three to five in a developmentally-appropriate, high-quality program; before- and after-school and vacation care for school age children; outreach and guidance for parents of children ages birth to three (including support groups and health and developmental screenings); support and training for family day care providers in the school neighborhood; and information and referral services for all members of the school community. A three-year outcome evaluation for a demonstration program indicated that children achieved higher academic outcomes than a matched comparison group. In addition, the program enjoys significant support from both parents and school personnel.

D. Implementation of the External, Independent Evaluation Project

The New Jersey Departments of Education (NJDOE) and Human Services (NJDHS) have contracted with Westat, an external, independent evaluation firm, to conduct a 60-month implementation and outcomes evaluation of the early childhood programs in the 30 Abbott school districts.

The evaluation has two important components: 1) a program implementation analysis; and 2) an assessment of child and family outcomes over time. The first component will provide information about how the early childhood education program is implemented across the 30 Abbott districts. It will also assess program implementation and the overall quality of classroom operations.

The second component will provide information about a sample of preschoolers and their families over a 60-month period. The study will use multiple methods, including direct observation of children, formal assessments and interviews with teachers and parents.